



Michlic, J. (2010). The Culture of Ethno-Nationalism and the Identity of Jews in Inter-War Poland: Some Responses to 'The Aces of Purebred Race'. In R. Cohen, J. Frankel, & S. Hoffman (Eds.), *Insiders and Outsiders: Dilemmas of East European Jewry* (1 ed., pp. 131-147). Littman Library of Jewish Civilization.

Early version, also known as pre-print

[Link to publication record in Explore Bristol Research](#)  
PDF-document

## University of Bristol - Explore Bristol Research

### General rights

This document is made available in accordance with publisher policies. Please cite only the published version using the reference above. Full terms of use are available:  
<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/red/research-policy/pure/user-guides/ebr-terms/>

# The Impact of Ethno-nationalism on the Identities of Jews and People of Jewish Origins in Modern Poland

Joanna B. Michlic

Modern Polish national identity has manifested in two opposing variants: an exclusivist ethno-national strain and an inclusive civic strain. The exclusivist ethnic vision of Polishness, characterized by the advocacy of a single culture and a single faith - ethnic Polish and Roman Catholic, fully developed in the post-1864 period. This vision of Polishness had a long lasting damaging effect on the relationship between ethnic Poles and other ethnic and cultural groups that inhabited the Polish territories. It also had a powerful impact on the identities of the minorities, particularly on Polish Jewry and individuals of Jewish origins because the advocates of this vision of Polishness saw in the Jews and persons of Jewish origin the most significant internal threatening Other, dangerous to all aspects of Polish national existence<sup>1</sup>.

The subject of how Polish Jews and individuals of Jewish origins fashioned their identities in relationship to exclusivist

---

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, J. B. Michlic, *Poland's Threatening Other. The Image of the Jew from 1880 to the Present*, Lincoln 2006.

ethnic Polish nationalism from the nineteenth century up to the present is intricate, intellectually fascinating and still relatively under-researched. Without in-depth research on the subject, it is not only difficult to understand the complexities of the relationship between Polishness and Jewishness in the lives of individuals belonging to the newly emerging modern Jewish cultural elite in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century and in the lives of remnants of Polish Jewry in the post-1945 period, but also the identities and silence on one's origins among the descendants of Frankist movement<sup>2</sup>. The Frankists emerged as a clearly defined social and cultural group in the late eighteenth century. Its emergence coincided with the gradual disintegration of the pre-modern multi-ethnic Polish state in which Jews and other religious and ethnic groups had constituted an intrinsic part of the social landscape. The Frankist movement had originally represented an offshoot of the eighteenth century Jewish mystical movement, but by the first two decades of the nineteenth century the first and the second generations of Frankists transformed themselves into Polish Catholics and noblemen who had produced a number of prominent thinkers and military figures committed to the Polish national cause<sup>3</sup>.

One could suggest that these two generations of Frankists

---

2 On the culturally assimilated Jewish elite at the end of the nineteenth century, see, for example, E. Mendelsohn, *Painting A People. Maurycy Gottlieb and Jewish Art*, Hanover - London 2002 (also available in Hebrew translation) and Id., *From Assimilation to Zionism in Lvov: The Case of Alfred Nossig*, in «Slavonic and East European Review», 49 (1971), pp. 521-534; Id., *Jewish Assimilation in Lvov: The Case of Wilhelm Feldman*, in «The Slavic Review», 28 (1969), pp. 577-590. On the identities of remnants of Polish Jewry in post-1945 Poland, see I. Hurwic-Nowakowska, *Social Analysis of Postwar Polish Jewry*, Jerusalem 1986; M. Melchior, *Společná tožsamosť jednotek*, Wydawnictwo, Warszawa 1990; Ead., *Zagłada a Tožsamosť: Polscy Żydzi ocaleni na 'aryjskich papierach'. Analiza doświadczenia biograficznego*, Warszawa 2004.

3 Recently interest in the history of the Frankist movement has been on increase. See, for example, various publications of two Polish scholars, J. Doktor and P. Maciejko.

were the first culturally assimilated group with roots in Jewish elites to be subjugated to modern exclusivist way of thinking, which began to crystallize at the end of the eighteenth century. As indicated in this volume by one of the key scholars of Frankism, Jan Doktór, the critical discourse about Frankists as members of Polish society originated during the Four Year Parliament. It continued during the romantic period when some conservative thinkers, politicians and writers insisted on viewing Frankists with suspicion and fear as an alien group capable to penetrate the ethnic Polish core. Such views were, for example, expressed in the anonymous pamphlet *O Żydach i judaizmie, czyli wykrycie zasad moralnych tudzież rozumowań Izraelitów przez I.* (A Discovery of the Israelite Way of Thinking) published in Siedlce in 1820, and in the famous national drama *Nie-Boska komedia* (The Undivine Comedy, 1835) written by Zygmunt Krasiński (1812-59), one of the three most salient romantic Polish writers next to Adam Mickiewicz and Juliusz Słowacki<sup>4</sup>.

The concept of exclusion from the framework of Polish nation of those persons of Jewish origins and their offspring who had given up their Jewish cultural identity and converted to Catholicism was harbored in the extreme ethno-nationalist circles throughout the twentieth century. One could find its contemporary remnants in the unsuccessful efforts at the exclusion of members of Polish cultural and political elites of Jewish origins such as the writer Jan Brzechwa from the pantheon of 'the true Poles'. It could also be found in the opposite tendency that springs from the same ethno-nationalist way of thinking that is insistence that famous members of Polish cultural and political elites past and present are totally

---

4 For excerpts of the pamphlet *About Jews and Judaism - a Discovery of the Israelite Way of Thinking by I.*, see M. Mises, *Z rodu żydowskiego: zastużone rodziny polskie krwi niegdyś żydowskiej*, Warszawa 1991 (reprinted from 1938), p. 18. On Krasiński's perspective on Jewish converts, see M. Opalski - I. Bartal, *Poles and Jews: a Failed Brotherhood*, Hanover 1992, p. 19 and M. Janion, *Do Europy; tak, ale razem ale z naszymi umarłymi*, Warszawa 2000.

ethnically Polish without a drop of an 'alien blood', a tendency discerningly observed in this volume by Irena Grudzińska-Gross. This latter tendency has long been harbored with regards to well known accomplished Poles, including those of Frankist descent.

This paper does not concentrate on the impact of Polish ethnonationalism on the identity of Frankists' descendants, but instead focuses on the impact of this nationalism on two different social groups among interwar Polish Jewry: the members of the culturally assimilated Polish-Jewish intelligentsia and the cultural Jewish nationalists, and the responses of both groups to the concept of exclusive ethnic Polishness. In my view, this analysis could provide a broader historical framework for the study of Frankists' descendants' attitudes toward their origin and identities, and for understanding the social climate that surrounded this numerically insignificant cultural group in the modern era.

At the center of my examination are two protagonists belonging to the same generation with five years difference between them. The first is Julian Tuwim, one of the most talented modern Polish poets and translators of Russian poetry into Polish, born in 1894 in Łódź, then a city under the Russian rule. The second protagonist is a less well-known Polish Jewish writer, Samuel Jakub Imber (Shmul Yakov Imber), a cultural Jewish nationalist born in 1889 in Sasów (Sasov) in the part of Austro-Hungarian Galicia in which Polish cultural influence was strong. Despite differences in the geography, politics and culture of the regions in which Tuwim and Imber grew up, both were educated in the Polish gymnasium. Both were students and admirers of Polish romantic literature. Its influence can be found in both their writings.

Although not as prolific as Tuwim, Imber was also a man of many artistic talents. He was the raising star of Yiddish poetry in Lwów (Lviv) in the first decade of the twentieth century and a literary expert on the Irish playwright Oscar

Wilde<sup>5</sup>. Unlike Tuwim, he vigorously objected to cultural assimilation and, instead, advocated and lived by the concept of civic assimilation (*obywatelska asymilacja*).

By the late 1920s and during the 1930s Imber became one of the most outspoken critics and satirists of Polish exclusivist ethno-nationalism. In his passionate polemics with both cultural and political ethno-nationalists, he spoke from the position of a Polish Jew who deeply believed in the civic values of citizenship. In these polemics Imber appears as the unintentional champion of inclusive civic Polishness.

### *The ethno-nationalistic vision of a Polish culture and Polish Jews*

As with other ethno-nationalist cultural projects, the defining feature of interwar Polish ethno-nationalism was the quest for achieving both ethnic and cultural sameness within the nation. This was the main goal of National Democracy, the core ethno-nationalistic party in interwar Poland, and its offshoot radical organizations<sup>6</sup>. The Polish Roman Catholic Church, a highly ethno-nationalistic institution closely interlinked with the political movement of National Democracy, was similarly obsessed with the purity of 'the soul' of a 'Pole-Catholic' (*Polak-Katolik*). Both the National Democracy and

---

5 See S.J. Imber, *Pieśń i dusza Oskara Wilde'a*, Warszawa - Kraków 1934. Imber made his debut as a Yiddish poet with a volume of *Vos ich zing un zog* published in Lwów in 1909. He is also the author of a long poem in Yiddish, *Esterke*, dedicated to the legendary love affair between the King of Poland Casimir the Great and a Jewish woman, Esther. The poem was published in 1911 and enjoyed popularity among Imber's coevals. On the development of Yiddish literature and culture in the first decade of the twentieth century in Galicia where Imber was born, see G. Kohlbauer-Fritz, *Yiddish and Jewish Cultural Identity in Galicia and Vienna*, in «Polin», 12 (1999), pp. 164-178.

6 On the project of cultural purification of the nation by ethno-nationalists see A. D. Smith, *Ethnic Nationalism and the Plight of Minorities*, in «Journal of Refugee Studies», VII, 2/3 (1994), pp. 191-192.

the Roman Catholic Church desired to conduct a moral and spiritual revolution, that would bring about one uniform desirable collective way of life: conservative, traditional and Catholic in character. They perceived the Jew as the chief obstacle in the realization of their cultural project because they categorized the Jew as the embodiment and carrier of modernity, liberalism, socialism and avant-garde traditions that they defined as alien and as a threat to Polishness. They therefore regarded the Jewish influence as the cause of all imperfections, weaknesses and shortcomings found amongst the ethnic Poles. In fact, the radical ethno-nationalists argued that the mere presence of the Jewish community in the midst of ethnic Polish community triggered a sense of confusion about identity amongst the ethnic/Christian Poles. They blamed physical proximity of Jews to Poles in cities, towns and countryside «for polluting the mentality and soul of the ethnic Poles». Poles were so to speak prevented from «breathing in Polish spirit», and thus, from becoming «better Poles»<sup>7</sup>. Thus «dejudaization» of culture and society was the only viable strategy of «improving the ethnic Poles», of helping them to re-discover their «real identity and collective destiny»<sup>8</sup>.

The project of «dejudaization» in the realm of culture had as its chief target the culturally assimilated Polish-Jewish intelligentsia and Poles of Jewish origin<sup>9</sup>. In fact, the ethno-

---

7 See for example Rev. S. Kaczorowski, in «Pro Christo», 7 (1933), p. 4.

8 Rev. S. Trzeciak, *Pornografia narzędziem obcych agentur*, Warszawa 1929, p. 45.

9 On the subject of the National Democratic treatment of the acculturated Polish Jews see E. Prokop-Janiec, *Polish-Jewish Literature in the Interwar Years*, Syracuse - New York 2003, pp. 69-82 (English translation of a book originally published in Polish in 1992) and M. Domagalska, *Antysemityzm dla inteligencji*, Warszawa 2004. See also essays on the situation of Julian Tuwim and Antoni Slonimski written by the controversial Marxist literary critic A. Sandauer, *Pisma*, vol. 3, pp. 463-474; Z. Bauman, in «Literary», 273-299; M. J. Kryński, *Politics And Poetry: The Case Of Julian Tuwim*, in «The Polish Review», 4 (1974), pp. 11-14; and

nationalists perceived both of these groups as the most pernicious threat to Polish culture. National Democrats propagated a persistent image in popular culture of the assimilated Jew as a cause of degeneration or even destruction of all cultural institutions such as theatre, cinema, cabaret, and radio industry. They portrayed Jews as polluters of music, arts, the vernacular Polish language and Polish literature and history. Ethno-nationalist writers called the Jewish presence in the arts a spiritual disease (*schorzenie duchowe*) and an abomination (*żydowskie paskudztwo*). The Endeks' zealous need to purify the national language and literature from alien elements closely resembled the trend advocated in late nineteenth century France by Charles Maurras (1868 - 1952) or in Germany by Richard Wagner<sup>10</sup>. They insisted that Polish Jewish artists who wrote in Polish language were not creating Polish literature, but were simply using the Polish language as a «technical medium» for their works. The Endeks categorized works in Polish by Jews as intrinsically alien to the Polish spirituality: «Tuwim does not write Polish poetry; he only uses the Polish language. His poetry does not represent the spirit of Juliusz Słowacki, but that of Heinrich Heine [...] the soul of a merchant and Jewish poet»<sup>11</sup>.

In the more radical ethno-nationalistic Roman Catholic circles Jewish converts to Catholicism were also viewed as polluters of a very dangerous type: they were the ones who could spoil the biological purity of the ethnic Poles through

---

A. Polonsky, *Why did they hate Tuwim and Boy so much? Jews and 'artificial Jews' in the Literary Polemics in the Second Polish Republic*, in R. Blobaum (ed.), *Anti-Semitism and its Opponents in Poland*, Ithaca - London 2005, pp. 189-209.

10 On the importance of language in ethno-nationalistic projects of self-purification of nations see E. Kedourie, *Nationalism*, Cambridge 1994, pp. 108-109 and A. D. Smith, *Ethnic Nationalism and the Plight of Minorities*, cit., pp. 190-191.

11 See the editorial column in «Kurier Warszawski», 52 (21.2.1921), p. 2.



the physical «infiltration» through marriage. They not only excluded the Jewish converts from the membership in the Polish nation but also from the Roman Catholic community. The converts were allocated a somewhat precarious place in an abstract Catholic community<sup>12</sup>.

The Marian Order monthly «Pro Christo», the weekly «Kultura», published by the Central Institute of «Akcja Katolicka» (Catholic Action), as well as well-known public figures such as the ultra conservative journalist and politician Stanisław Mackiewicz-Cat (1896-1966) and the writer Zofia Kossak-Szczucka (1890-1968), a leading member of Catholic Action, were outspoken representatives of this extreme racial position<sup>13</sup>. Moderate influential Catholic papers such as «Przegląd Katolicki» and «Ateneum Kapłańskie» also treated the converted Jews as an unfortunate group that should have its own separate church<sup>14</sup>.

*The milieu of the Polish-Jewish intelligentsia: Julian Tuwim's sense of Polishness and responses to ethnic nationalism*

In interwar Poland members of the culturally assimilated, Polonized Jewish intelligentsia seem to have been the most af-

---

12 A. Landau-Czajka describes cases of denying converted Jews a membership within the Polish nation. See A. Landau-Czajka, *The Image of the Jew in the Catholic Press during the Second Republic*, in «Polin», 8 (1994), pp. 152-154, 146-175.

13 On cases of negative approach of well-known conservative intellectuals towards converted Jews, see E. Melzer, *Anti-Semitism in the Last Years of the Second Polish Republic*, in Y. Gutman – E. Mendelshon – Ch. Shmeruk – Y. Reinharz, eds., *The Jews of Poland Between Two World Wars*, Hanover - London 1989, pp. 135-136; Sz. Rudnicki, *Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny. Geneza i działalność*, Warszawa 1985, p. 307 and A. Landau-Czajka, *W jednym stali domu...Koncepcje rozwiązania kwestii żydowskiej w publicystyce polskiej*, Warszawa 1998, pp. 251-252. The subject of converted Jews in interwar Polish society still needs a separate scholarly analysis.

14 See J. B. Michlic, *Poland's Threatening Other*, cit.

affected by the various manifestations of the ethno-nationalistic concept of Polishness. They were affected by it on both professional and existential levels and their reactions toward the nationalistic, antisemitic social climate ranged from dismissal, mockery and anger to despair. To grasp fully their anxieties this climate caused, one has to look at their relationship to Jewishness, a subject that has not yet fully been explored.

Tuwim, the most famous protagonist of the Polonized Jewish intelligentsia and the chief target of the antisemitic attacks - «the beté noire of the Endeks» - primarily conceived himself as a Polish artist and desired to be perceived that way. To paraphrase the words of the French Jewish historian Marc Bloch, Tuwim «drank of the waters of Polish culture, made Poland's past his own and breathed freely only in her climate»<sup>15</sup>.

He expressed his yearnings for belonging to the Polish high culture and for union with Poland for the first time in his poems from the formative period that coincided with the First World War. In these little known poems, of which many are autobiographical and were never published by the poet himself, Tuwim emerges, to use the concept of the American-Russian scholar Yuri Slezkine, as a universal Mercurian who yearns to become a local Apollonian<sup>16</sup>. Like other universal Mercurians turning into local Apollonians, young Tuwim embarked on the process of reshaping his identity along individualistic choices and ideas. On this journey his reactions to Jewishness became ambivalence, shame and embarrassment. He perceived Jewish ethnicity as a source of internal painful tensions; as an unshakable identity that might prevent him from becoming whom he desires to be.

---

15 See M. Bloch, *Strange Defeat. A Statement of Evidence written in 1940*, New York 1968, p. 3 (Reprint from the first English translation published in 1949 by Oxford University Press).

16 Y. Slezkine, *The Jewish Century*, Princeton - Oxford 2004, especially pp. 129-137.

Tuwim gave a passionate expression to all these emotions in the poem *Pod bodźcem wieków* (Under the turn of the centuries) that he never attempted to publish. *Pod bodźcem wieków*, dedicated to his poet friend Witold Wandurski (1891-1937), opens with the lines expressing the depth of the poet's yearning for total embrace of Polishness and the internal torment caused by the realization of the limitations to this fusion.

Semitic blood flows in me,  
Hot blood, passionate blood,  
Oh, Aryans I love you so much,  
Oh, Poland - the sun. You are my country<sup>17</sup>.

In the poem, Tuwim articulated the belief in an essentialist notion of Jewish identity. For him Jewishness was «something in the blood» and represented «a tragic dimension» in his life. This conviction accompanied Tuwim throughout the interwar period and somehow stood in opposition to the poet's simultaneous insistence of re-modeling one's identity along individualist choices, free of social constraints. In 1924, Tuwim spoke about the internal torment caused by the complexities of his self-identification in an interview, which appeared in «Nasz Przegląd», the main Polish-language press of the culturally assimilated Polish-Jewish intelligentsia.

For me the 'Jewish Question' lies in my blood, it is a part of my psyche. It is like a wedge that cuts into my worldview and into my deepest and most personal experiences... For me the 'Jewish problem' is a tragedy and I am one of the many anonymous actors of this tragedy. I am una-

---

17 J. Tuwim, *Pod bodźcem wieków* (translation of the excerpt by the author). A. Kowalczykova published this excerpt of the poem in *Jak Tuwim swój młodościowy wizerunek korygował*, in «Skamander», III, *Studia o poezji Juliana Tuwima*, red. I. Opacki, Katowice 1982, pp. 78-85. E. Prokop-Janiec mentions the first two lines of this poem in *Polish-Jewish Literature in the Interwar Years*, cit., endnote 3, p. 281.

ble to foresee the final act of it and when will take place<sup>18</sup>.

In the same interview he insisted: «I am a Polonized Jew, ‘the Jew-Pole’ and I do not care about what one or the other side (the Poles and the Jews) think about this. I am brought up in Polish culture and my entire soul is unconsciously attached to Polishness»<sup>19</sup>.

Tuwim’s almost ‘congenital’ nervousness about his Jewish origin that might prevent him from merging with Polishness was a condition experienced by many of his generation. For example, it loomed over the youth of the future highly acclaimed poet, Aleksander Wat. Wat was born in 1900 to an old distinguished Jewish family. He was attracted to futurism and communism in his youth and like Tuwim from time to time wished to depart the Jewish world completely and for good.

You could not call me an antisemite, but at that time I wanted no part of Jewish customs and culture. I was not an assimilationist and had considered myself a cosmopolitan since I was a child. And so this did not come from any desire to be sophisticated: it was not snobbery. I grew up right at the boundary of two worlds where each was very distinct, condensed, developed: and the point where they met was on a high level. I wanted to leave one part entirely behind. And so I moved very far away from Judaism<sup>20</sup>.

### Generations of highly Polonized Jews born on the eve

---

18 Julian Tuwim interviewed by S. Leben, *Luminarze literatury polskiej o kwestii żydowskiej. Ankieta «Naszego Przeglądu»*, in «Nasz Przegląd» 6 (6. 1. 1924), p. 2. This interview can also be found in the collection of interviews with Tuwim from interwar, wartime and postwar periods published by T. Januszewski, Tuwim’s biographer and main expert of his poetry. T. Januszewski, *Rozmowy z Tuwimem*, Warszawa 1994, pp. 14-15.

19 J. Tuwim, *Luminarze literatury polskiej*, cit., p. 2.

20 A. Wat’s comments on his departure from the Jewish world published in his memoirs, A. Wat, *My Century*, New York 2003, pp. 152-153 (second English edition; originally published in Polish: Id., *Mój Wiek*, Londyn 1977).

of Poland's regaining independence were also tormented by a similar sense of split of identity. In his memoirs, the famous Shakespearian critic and essayist Jan Kott, twenty years Tuwim's junior, speaks about similar anxieties that he experienced in his youth. Kott was the great-great grandson of the nineteenth century important Jewish publisher Hilary Nussbaum: his father had him convert to Catholicism in 1919 at age five because he believed that «otherwise there would be no future for his son among Poles»<sup>21</sup>. The fact that he was raised Roman Catholic, an identity marker that was at the time commonly understood, as the essence of Polishness, did not prevent young Kott from experiencing internal anxieties about the wholeness and integrity of his Polish identity. He articulated this internal identity torment in a poem full of Christian imagery.

To what Mary will you turn, where are your brothers and sisters?  
 The Star of David always runs after you.  
 In vain you wash with water, in vain you try to betray  
 Your mirror shows a forehead furrowed with shades of ancestors<sup>22</sup>.

Kott found refuge from his torment in Laski, the Catholic Center for the Blind near Warsaw, that enjoyed the reputation of a cultural and spiritual home to Jewish converts to Catholicism in interwar Poland, and abroad in interwar Paris where he went to study.

The agony over the impossibility of shedding the traces of one's ethnicity was not the only reaction to Jewishness expressed by the Jewish Mercurians who yearned to transform themselves into Polish Apollonians. In fact, these reactions were mixed and accompanied by contradictory reactions, expressing 'positive connection' and 'retreats to Jewishness'.

---

21 J. Kott cites the opinion of his father in Id., *Still Alive. An Autobiographical Essay*, New Haven - London 1990, p. 17.

22 *Ivi*, p. 16.

This points to the phenomenon of fluidity of identity that was manifested not only in the changes of identity over time, but also in assuming different identity in different contexts at the same time. The case in point is Tuwim.

Tuwim's poems from the formative period articulate the desire to simultaneously embrace and reject one's ethnic identity, cultural heritage or history. In *Tragedia* (Tragedy), a poem written approximately at the same time as *Pod bodźcem wieków*, yearning for union with Poland is accompanied with expressions of pride in Jewishness, interpreted as an ancient culture and ancient people. Characteristically, the positive evaluation of Jewishness as a rule emerges in the context of poet's discourse with Polishness in which the latter is criticized, mocked and ridiculed.

It appears that Tuwim's personal negative experiences triggered the writing of embittered lines about his beloved Poland. Tuwim who witnessed as a child the anti-Jewish riots in Łódź in 1905 and experienced an increasing anti-Jewish atmosphere in the city during the First World War was acutely aware that many local Apollonians did not view him as a member of the same community and did not accept the individualistic interpretation of his identity. Awareness of that rejection erupts in abruptly angry images; suddenly Tuwim reverses himself and portrays the Poles as a rotten contemptible people. *Tragedia* opens with the line expressing the same torment over not being able to become completely Polish because of his Jewish ethnic heritage, but it closes on a totally different note with a sharp reversal value judgment passed on Polishness and Jewishness:

My worst tragedy is that I am a Jew  
 But I fell in love with the Christian soul of the Aryans.  
 Something inside me spurs me with a sweeping motion  
 And reminds me of the ancient racial heritage...  
 And the Semitic blood fights with another Spirit  
 In the aged long storm and in the magnitude of thoughts

And then I am proud - I the aristocrat,  
The son of the ancient people – the source of Messianism  
And I am ashamed that my blood fraternizes with the nation of slaves  
With the homeless contemptible cowards<sup>23</sup>.

The opposition between Jewishness and Polishness Tuwim expressed in *Tragedy* set a pattern for the poet's later literary responses toward the increasing ethno-nationalistic anti-Tuwim propaganda of the late 1920s and the 1930s. He channeled a lot of his energy to respond to his adversaries. In an important article discussing the National Democrats' hatred of Tuwim, the historian of Polish Jewry Antony Polonsky gives examples of Tuwim's poems in which pride in Jewishness is expressed in the context of the poet's mockery of the ethno-nationalistic adversaries such as Stanisław Pieńkowski, Jan RembIELiński and Zygmunt Wasilewski, the major writers and literary critics of «Myśl Narodowa», the key theoretical paper of the National Democracy<sup>24</sup>.

And to think that from all  
The fine activity  
Of this gentleman – from the spittle  
Wheezing, screaming, scribbling,  
Spewing, kicking and wailing  
On which he has lost half his life  
From the books and articles

---

23 J. Tuwim, *Tragedia* (translation by the author). A. Kowalczykova published the poem in her article *Jak Tuwim swój młodościowy wizerunek korygował*, cit. The poem has various versions that have not been analyzed. I am grateful to Prof. Kowalczykova for discussing with me its various versions.

24 See, for example, S. Pieńkowski, *Poezja kryptożydowska*, in «Myśl Narodowa», 41 (1926), pp. 234-236; J. RembIELiński, *Na Widowni*, in «Myśl Narodowa», 45 (1931), pp. 178-179 and «Myśl Narodowa», 47 (1931), pp. 209-210; Z. Wasilewski, *Na Widowni*, in «Myśl Narodowa», 10 (1935) pp. 170-171. On antisemitism of Z. Wasilewski see the important monograph by E. Prokop-Janiec, *Literatura i nacjonalizm. Twórczość krytyczna Zygmunta Wasilewskiego*, Kraków 2004.

From the words, sentences and titles  
 From the reviews, from the sneering paragraphs  
 In a word from that whole  
 Journalistic mess  
 Will remain...one poem  
 And that will be – mine, not his.  
 Indeed this very poem...O stern revenge  
 Inspired by a Jewish God.  
 Here is a phrase, a few words with which I toy  
 To immortalize my enemy<sup>25</sup>.

From many written records of the interwar period it is clear that Tuwim as an individual and poet suffered tremendously from being labeled the outsider – the Jew and not a Polish poet<sup>26</sup>. Why was Tuwim, one of the most talented Polish poets of the twentieth century, so personally affected by the Endek scribblers such as Józef Aleksander Gałuszko? Tuwim craved recognition, even from the Polish world that was driven and lived by a narrow exclusivist ethnic sense of Polishness. That world was neither marginal nor lacking influence even in the literary and cultural circles, though the two latter circles were on the whole more favorable disposed towards acculturated Polish Jews than other social groups. The rejection of Tuwim's candidacy in 1938 from the *Polska Akademia Literatury* (Polish Academy of Literature) established in 1933, on the grounds that 'the currents pervading society are not conducive to accepting Tuwim to the Polish literary pantheon and that such acceptance might turn against the institution itself' strikingly reveal the might and pervasiveness of the ethno-nationalistic vision of Polish culture<sup>27</sup>.

---

25 Julian Tuwim's poem translated and cited by A. Polonsky, *Why Did They Hate Tuwim*, cit., pp. 200-201.

26 See J. Tuwim, *Luminarze literatury polskiej*, cit.

27 For insights on the rejection of Tuwim's candidacy to the Polish Academy of Literature, see Zofia Nalkowska, *Dzienniki*, vol. 4, 1930-1939, Cz. 2. Warszawa, 1988, pp. 279-280. Nalkowska was one of the members of the Committee of the Polish Academy of Literature, re-



That rejection was a significant blow to the poet who craved recognition and fusion with both the Polish cultural elites and the 'ordinary Polish man.' Tuwim, of course, found a spiritual oasis - a home - in the poetic group *Skamander* to which he belonged, and the circles of «Wiadomości Literackie» that regularly met in the famous Warsaw meeting point for liberal intelligentsia, Café Ziemiańska. His circles of colleagues and friends comprised of individuals like himself - members of the culturally assimilated Polish-Jewish intelligentsia - Poles of Jewish origins and Christian Poles who viewed Tuwim as a Polish artist and a Pole<sup>28</sup>.

The community of *Skamander*, «Wiadomości Literackie» and Café Ziemiańska provided Tuwim with the islands of open civic Polishness. However, he did not cease to be tormented by the antisemitic constant baiting, which undermined his sense of Polishness. The thought of being questioned as a Polish artist and of being denied the right to be recognized as Polish by individuals or sections of the ethnic Christian Polish community brought a dramatic and even tragic dimension to Tuwim's personal and professional life. The Endek propaganda drove the poet's dramatic retreats to Jewishness verbalized in the connections to the ancient Jewish culture and people. As a part of this connection the poet emphasized the Hebrew origin of his family name<sup>29</sup>. The Endek propaganda also created a sense of tensions around the poet's perceptions of

---

sponsible for admitting new candidates. The decision regarding the rejection of Tuwim's candidacy was made in spite of the fact that in the plebiscite organized by «Wiadomości Literackie» in 1934 Tuwim was identified as the most popular poet among the readers of the paper.

28 Tuwim's attitude to Jewish converts to Catholicism was also ambivalent, verging on condemnation. See Daniel Silberberg's interview with Julian Tuwim, *Godzina z Julianem Tuwimem. Rozmowa o Żydach i zagadnieniach literackich*, in «Nasz Przegląd», 46 (15.02.1935).

29 J. Tuwim, *Wywiady z pisarzami polskimi pochodzenia żydowskiego*, published in the Polish daily «Dziennik Warszawski», 34, 35 (6 and 7. 2. 1927), cited in T. Januszewski, *Rozmowy z Tuwimem*, cit., p. 25.

Polishness and led to his turns away from it. Thus, outside pressures and attitudes played a role in Tuwim's experienced fluidity of identity, manifested in different contexts at the same time.

Characteristically, Tuwim had a dark vision when it came to the discussion of Polish antisemitism and its impact on Polish society. He was convinced that «anti-Jewish prejudice poisoned almost the entire Polish society». Because of that realization he had grave doubts about the cultural assimilation of Polish Jews into the Polish community, a project that he himself was a product and saw as the ideal theoretical solution to the 'Jewish Question': «We should not forget that antisemitism in its pathological ('a-cultural') form poisoned almost the entire Polish society. Therefore in spite of the fact that I view cultural assimilation as the only solution to the 'Jewish Question', I do not believe in it»<sup>30</sup>.

At the same time he also on occasions thought that he himself, as well as Jews who maintained a strong moral-cultural code, might be somehow responsible for persistence of antisemitism<sup>31</sup>. In that one could detect the internalization of ethno-nationalist claim that the Jews bring antisemitic reactions upon themselves due their qualities and behavior.

*The milieu of cultural Jewish nationalists: Samuel Jacob Imber's sense of Polishness and responses to ethno-nationalists*

Samuel Jacob Imber did not suffer from the internal identity crisis that tormented Tuwim. In his writing there is no expression of anxiety over Jewish cultural identity in the context of encountering Polishness. Because of his

---

30 See J. Tuwim, *Luminarze literatury polskiej*, cit., p. 2.

31 *Ibidem*. In the quoted interview *Wywiady z pisarzami polskimi*, Tuwim somehow blamed himself and his colleagues from the poetic group *Skamander* for inflaming Polish-Jewish relations. Januszewski published this interview in *Rozmowy z Tuvimem*, cit., pp. 25-26.

fervent opposition to cultural assimilation, Imber was a self-defined/self-appointed outsider to Polish culture and community understood in an ethnic sense. Yet, at the same time, his polemical and satirical writings exemplify that Imber was deeply steeped in Polish history, politics and culture of Poland, as well as in European culture. In fact, Imber's astute understanding of various aspects of Polish life and Polish aesthetics suggest that he was «an inside observer» of Polish culture and the people. Polish Jewry had many such astute observers who came from Zionist and also other ideological and cultural backgrounds<sup>32</sup>.

Imber's self-conception played a key role in the way he responded to the ideology and program of Polish ethno-nationalists. Imber regularly wrote critical commentaries on the activities and writings of the Endeks in two Polish language Jewish dailies, «Chwila» (The Moment) published in Lwów, and «Nowy Dziennik» (The New Diary) published in Kraków. In 1934 Imber published a collection of the articles from these papers in the book *Aces of Purebred Race* (Aces of Purebred Race)<sup>33</sup>. Imber dedicated the book to the memory of his deceased friend Marcei Leonard Krajewski who fought for the freedom of Poland and was killed in the battle of Laski on 22 October 1914. *Aces of Purebred Race* was an instant success. The book was praised in the entire Jewish press as a masterpiece in fighting and ridiculing antisemitic lies.

In the second half of 1930s Imber edited the monthly «Oko w Oko» (Eye to Eye), in which he continued mocking antisemitic writers. «Oko w Oko» appeared between the

---

32 B. Singer, the colorful figure of interwar Polish Jewry and the Warsaw correspondent for the Zionist «Nowy Dziennik», was one of the sharpest critics and observers of the political scene in interwar Poland. Similarly to Imber, he vehemently opposed antisemitism in his witty elegant articles. See J.K. Rogozik, *Bernard Singer, the Forgotten 'Most Popular Jewish reporter of the Interwar years in Poland'*, in «Polin», 12 (1999), pp. 179-197.

33 S.J. Imber, *Aces of Purebred Race*, Kraków 1934.

summer 1936 and late 1938. It was the second monthly edited by Imber: his first Yiddish monthly, «Najland», was published between 1918 and 1919. In 1939 Imber published a collection of articles from «Oko w Oko» in the book with the meaningful witty title *Kąkol na roli* (Weeds in the fields)<sup>34</sup>.

All his polemical works are characterized by the use of an elegant yet passionate sharp tongue. Ridicule, satire and irony are Imber's main weapons at voicing indignation at the exclusivist ethnic nationalists whom he often calls the representatives of «the Haman-estate» (*Hamanistan*). His close affinity with Polish culture combined with a lack of ambivalence toward Jewishness vis-à-vis Polishness gave his commentaries qualities that are absent in the writings of the culturally assimilated Polish-Jewish intelligentsia. He became an outstanding satirist demonstrating the poverty and lack of logic of exclusivist ethno-nationalistic, antisemitic thought, its internal inconsistencies and non-rational approach lacking congruency with reality.

One of Imber's main strategies in exposing the lack of logic and inconsistencies of the ethno-nationalistic thought was drawing comparisons between the National Democrats' position on the Jewish minority in Poland and the National Democrats' position on the Catholic Polish immigrants in Western countries. For example, in the first issue of «Oko w Oko» published in July 1936, Imber discusses the reactions of the Polish press to Jan Rozwadowski's book about the situation of Polish immigrants in France in which the author complained about the French prejudicial attitudes toward the Poles<sup>35</sup>. The book published in 1927 by the Polish Workers'

---

34 S.J. Imber, *Kąkol na roli*, Lwów 1939. The volume includes articles published in «Oko w Oko» in July and December 1936, April, May, June and July 1937 and April and October 1938. The volume is mostly dedicated to Imber's polemics with anti-Jewish position within the Roman Catholic Church in Poland, particularly the writings of Rev. S. Trzeciak.

35 S.J. Imber, *Melodie murzyńskie*, in «Oko w Oko», 1 (7. 1936), pp. 9-13.

University in France, was received with enthusiasm by Polish press, including the moderate papers such as «Kurier Poranny»<sup>36</sup>. In the book Rozwadowski asserts that the French treat the Poles as a useful cheap laborers yet outsiders: the Poles are treated like the «Negroes who did their job and must leave». Rozwadowski and the Polish press unanimously condemned such attitudes as unjust and prejudicial. Imber convincingly argues that in the debate about the position of the Jewish community in Poland, the Polish nationalists expose attitudes toward the Jews that are similar to those that they condemned in the case of the French. However, they do not view their own views as shocking and contemptible, but as «the just and objective reactions against the Jewish flood».

All of those who so unanimously protested against «the suffering of the Polish Negro on the French land» – have at their own home nonetheless «a suffering Negro» who does not have spokesmen who could express their condemnation as freely as they could. As it turns out Jews who have lived in Poland not for the last nine years but for the last nine hundred years, suddenly have become the Blacks who long ago did their job and now must leave the country. Day after day for many years we have listened to these messages expressed in various ways, starting with almost illiterate slogans posted on the walls and ending at much more fluent, elegant and stylish calls and brochures expressed at any occasions<sup>37</sup>.

Imber is also a superb sharp analyst of the prejudicial anti-Jewish attitudes among the Polish Roman Catholic clergy and the immediate impact of anti-Jewish preaching on the parishioners. In the careful analysis of the writing and sermons of Reverend Stanisław Trzeciak, Imber discusses Trzeciak's demagoguery and points to his destructive influence that led to physical attacks against individual Jews who attended Trzeciak's lectures and sermons. In the analyses of the

---

36 J. Rozwadowski, *Emigracja polska we Francji: europejski ruch wychodźczy*, Lille 1927.

37 S.J. Imber, *Melodie murzyńskie*, cit., pp. 10-11.

evolution of Trzeciak's thinking about Jews, Imber points to the endorsement of the *Protocols of Zion* as a crucial moment in the development of Trzeciak's radical antisemitism. Imber manifests expertise in Christian theology and Christian-Jewish relations in his discussion of attitudes of various European Christian Churches toward Jews in the 1930s. Imber poignantly observes that among the Christian Churches that unanimously condemned the Nazi policies towards Jews in the 1930s the only Polish voice came from the representative of a religious minority in Poland. That was Grzegorz Chomyszyn, Bishop of the Uniate Church of the Stanisławów Diocese<sup>38</sup>.

What is striking about Imber's polemical exchanges with the ethno-nationalists is his vehement defense of the Polishness of the writers and poets such as Julian Tuwim. Imber approaches them differently than other Jewish poets and writers of Zionist leanings: his approach is more complex and more sympathetic towards their predicament.

Imber and Tuwim belonged to two different Jewish worlds that regarded each other with suspicion and even contempt. The contempt sometimes erupted into outbursts of tension and hateful exchanges. By the second half of 1930s the Jewish nationalists accused the culturally assimilated Polish-Jewish intelligentsia of disloyalty and betrayal of Jewish heritage and people, whereas the Polonized Jewish intelligentsia accused the cultural Zionists of obscurantism, bigotry and separatism bordering on Jewish chauvinism. Antony Polonsky and the Polish literary historian Eugenia Prokop-Janiec discuss<sup>39</sup> many intellectual skirmishes between these two groups in which the categories of 'we' and 'they' are applied to delineate the boundary between the two groups.

There is no doubt that the increasing antisemitic climate of

---

38 S.J. Imber, *Listy, które go nie doszły*, in «Oko w Oko», 3 (1936), pp. 5-12. In this article Imber discusses the voices of Christian Churches published in the small book *Gdy nienawiść szaleje*.

39 E. Prokop-Janiec, *Polish-Jewish Literature in the Interwar Years*, cit., pp. 88-95 and A. Polonsky, *Why Did They Hate Tuwim*, cit., pp. 194-195.

the 1930s seems to have contributed to the reinforcement and sharpening of the boundaries between these two groups of artists. Ethnic like criteria and the divisive ethno-nationalistic like terms and perspective began to be applied in the discourse between them<sup>40</sup>.

Like other cultural Zionist writers, Imber did not approve of Tuwim's choice of self-conception and self-identification. In his best-known article, *Co nam i Tobie Tuwimie?*, written in December 1929 - the year of increasing calls for dejudaization of Polish culture - Imber states the reasons for his disapproval of Tuwim's choice of identification<sup>41</sup>. His critical remarks are characteristic of the entire milieu of Jewish Zionist artists:

What do we and you have in common Tuwim, what do we and you have in common Slonimski (Antoni), what do we and all of you have denied us or have never known us have in common? You have renounced your affiliation to the Jewish nation, you do not know our souls and so treat us frequently like strangers and enemies, your song does not resound with our national language or with the language of our people<sup>42</sup>.

At the same time, Imber is convinced that the culturally assimilated Polish Jewish artists did not much care about his or other Zionist writers' criticism of them, but instead were mainly pre-occupied only with the negative opinions coming from the well-known nationalistic literary critics such as Karol Hubert Rostworowski and Adolf Nowaczyński. Yet, in spite

---

40 This is a subject that requires a separate analysis.

41 S.J. Imber, *Co nam i Tobie Tuwimie?* in Id., *Asy czystej rasy*, cit., pp. 11-42. The article was a direct response to K. H. Rostworowski's lecture *O sanacje literatury polskiej*. The title of Imber's article directly hints on the phrase used by the Polish cultural ethno-nationalists in their rejection of the culturally assimilated Polish Jewish poets and writers. They applied the phrase *Tuwim, what have you to do with Poland* to stress the lack of essential connection between him and Polish culture. This phrase echoes the Gospel of St. John (2. 4) where Jesus allegedly rebukes his Mother for urging him to perform the miracle.

42 *Iwi*, p. 41.

of this recognition and his ideological opposition to the identification choices of Tuwim and poets of his mindset, Imber is sympathetic to their fragile position among Polish cultural elites and within Polish society as a whole. Imber astutely interpreted their personal and professional drama.

You have chosen a hard path for yourself, you - dedicated laborers of the Polish word, you vassals of the Polish culture. We the Jewish poets also do not walk on a bed of roses, but you chose a path that is like the real Way of the Cross. Our audience at worst could reject our inspired words, but anybody from your audience could shout at you: Go away! You have no right to speak in our language<sup>43</sup>.

In defending the Polishness of Tuwim and other like-minded poets, Imber emphasised the criterion of the language. According to Imber the language defines the place of the artist in a collectivity and the language also constitutes the key criterion of the civic identity<sup>44</sup>. He ridicules the Endeks' strategy of interpreting Tuwim as a non-Polish poet on the grounds that 'Jewish spirit' contaminates his writings. He mocks the ethno-nationalistic interpretation of cultural and social trends such as utilitarianism, sexuality and physicality, sensualism and revolutionary spirit as the intrinsic Jewish literary traditions, threatening the Polishness of the Polish literature. Imber demonstrates that these allegedly 'Jewish devils' are the literary traditions commonly found among 'the pure Aryan' - the ethnic Christian Polish poets and writers of Young Poland, such as Jan Kasproicz and Leopold Staff.

Imber pays tribute to the artistic talents of poets of the Polonized Jewish intelligentsia. His assessment of their talents and their contribution to Polish literature closely resembles the assessment of the culturally assimilated Polish poets by the 'giant' of Polish drama Witold Gombrowicz, who was a frequent visitor of the Café Ziemiańska in Warsaw where poets

---

43 *Ivi*, pp. 40-41.

44 *Ivi*, p. 21.



like Tuwim found their spiritual and intellectual refuge. Both Imber and Gombrowicz assert that the culturally assimilated Polish poets and writers bring universal values to the Polish literature. According to Gombrowicz this group of poets and writers «connects the Poles to the most profound and most difficult problems of the world»<sup>45</sup>.

At the end of the article *Co nam i Tobie Tuwimie?* Imber expresses hope that the future generations of Poles would cease to view Tuwim as the outsider and would pay him deserved tribute. This stance reveals how much Imber himself was connected to the Polish world in spite of his chosen position as the outsider and how much he hoped for the disappearance of exclusionary and antisemitic way of thinking in Poland.

«You, who every day give birth in holy pain to the Polish word and to the free soul of this country, you have to remain intertwined with your creation. The better and more righteous future generations will acknowledge your contribution and will give back to you your deserved place... And no man will say to another man: 'What I have to do with you...»<sup>46</sup>.

In November 1937 Imber once again vehemently defended the Polishness of Tuwim and other Poles of Jewish origins that belonged to the circle of «Wiadomości Literackie». In the article *Smalone duby autora Pałuby czyli gdy człowiek robi się starszy* (Gibberish of the Author of *The Hag*, in Other Words When a Man is Getting Old), Imber writes a powerful mockery of Karol Irzykowski's claim asserting that the culturally assimilated Jewish intelligentsia and Poles of Jewish origin concentrated in the circle of «Wiadomości Literackie» are «Jews who are undecided Poles who could easily cease to be Polish»<sup>47</sup>. Irzykowski (1873-1944), who was a respected literary

---

45 W. *Polish Memories*, New Haven - London, 2004, p. 180 (originally published in Polish under the title *Wspomnienia polskie*, Kraków 2002).

46 S.J. Imber, *Co nam i Tobie Tuwimie?*, cit., p. 43.

47 S.J. Imber, *Smalone duby autora Pałuby czyli gdy człowiek robi się starszy*, in «Oko w oko», 8 (11.1937), pp. 1-16. Imber dedicates the entire issue to the discussion of Irzykowski's contention that the culturally assimilated

critic and writer, voiced this claim earlier that year in the open letter to the cultural Zionist poet Stefan Pomer, published in «Kurier Poranny». Other literary critics such as Karol Hubert Rostworowski and the popular writer of children's literature Kornel Makuszyński supported Irzykowski's contention. The young poet Alfred Łaszowski, (1914-1997) associated with the radical Fascist organization ONR *Falanga* followed in Irzykowski's step and published the same year a similar contention about culturally assimilated Jews in the article *Prosto z mostu*<sup>48</sup>. In the letter Irzykowski not only accuses Tuwim and Słonimski of being 'undecided Poles' but also undermines the Polishness of Tadeusz Boy-Zeleński, one of the outstanding literary critics of interwar Poland and Irzykowski's competitor. Irzykowski also undermines the Polishness of the acculturated Polish Jew Wilhem Feldman, a well known literary critic of the Young Poland period who wrote an elegant but critical review of Irzykowski's one acclaimed novel *Patuba* (*The Hag*) published in 1903.

Imber ridicules Irzykowski by demonstrating how petty and personal he is in his war against the culturally assimilated Jewish poets, writers and literary critics and artists of Jewish origins. His views about the author of *Patuba* as a «dry, caustic and colorless writer and jealous and embittered critic» closely resemble the opinion of Irzykowski voiced by Czesław Miłosz in the *History of Polish Literature* published in 1969<sup>49</sup>. Imber calls Irzykowski's contention about 'the Jews as the Poles with a distance who could easily cease to be Polish' as «a mangy from the old age nonsense» (*sparszywniały od starości nonsense*). Imber considers it as an insult not only voiced against one

---

lated Jew is «a Pole with reserve who could easily cease to be Polish» (*Żyd to Polak z rezerwą: może łatwo przestać nim być*).

48 For interesting observations about Alfred Łaszowski as a radical antisemitic writer, see R. Matuszewski, *Alfabet. Wybór z pamięci 90-latką*, Warszawa 2004, pp. 280-281.

49 Cz. Miłosz, *The History of Polish Literature*, London -New York 1969 (first edition).

group of culturally assimilated Polish Jews and Poles of Jewish origins, but against many generations of Polish Jews of various cultural and ideological orientations who had been committed to the Polish state and who had contributed to the development of Polish high culture in the pre-independence period<sup>50</sup>.

«Many 'Jews=Poles' - the politicians and writers, dedicated publishers, fighters, founders of schools and teachers, and artists and scientists – all had served Poland without reserve and unselfishly before the voices from the least worthy political camps began to speak in harsh tone about 'the Jewish invasion' and 'the unwanted alien elements'»<sup>51</sup>.

Imber's sarcastic statement that «in today's Poland no Jew is a Pole, but a Polish citizen with such a dose of reserve as it is imposed upon him by the Polish Christian community», not only reveals his strong sense of Jewishness but also his self-identification as a Polish Jew loyal to the concept of the civic Polish citizenship.

In retrospect, and especially from a contemporary post-1989 vantage point, Imber's understanding of Polishness bears similarity to that kind of Polishness that the first post-communist Polish Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki endorsed in his political manifesto.

The Polish state cannot be an ideological or religious state. It has to be a state in which no citizen would experience discrimination or would be treated in a privileged way because of his ideological convictions... The government wishes to cooperate with the Roman Catholic Church and all other denominations in Poland... Poland is a homeland of not only Poles. We live on this land together with representatives of other 'national groups.' The government wishes that they would see themselves as a part of Poland and would cultivate their languages and their

---

50 On the contribution of Polish Jews to the Polish culture see A. Hertz, *The Jews in Polish Culture*, Evanston Ill. 1988.

51 See J. Imber, *Smalone duby*, cit., p. 10.

cultures, and thus enrich our common society<sup>52</sup>.

This is the Polishness that many Poles in the past had difficulty envisaging and accepting as Father Adam Boniecki editor in chief of the liberal Catholic weekly «Tygodnik Powszechny» acknowledged during the recent long lasting debate about Jedwabne<sup>53</sup>. This is also the concept of Polishness that has been conducive to the revival of the institutionalized Jewish life in post-communist Poland and to the new social phenomenon of 'being openly Jewish' manifested in positive re-evaluations of Jewish origins by well-known Polish intellectuals. The case in point is Michał Głowiński, the distinguished Polish literary critic<sup>54</sup>. Głowiński's public endorsement of Jewishness in the early 2000s as a positive layer of his personal identity that could be agreeable and compatible with the layers of his Polish identity is a new cultural phenomenon, taking place in the social and political climate of the postcommunist Poland. The endorsement of Polishness and Jewishness as two compatible layers of one's identity was impossible to develop among the assimilated Polish-Jewish intelligentsia of the interwar period

---

52 Speech of Tadeusz Mazowiecki made in Polish parliament in August 1989, cited in Rev. M. Czajkowski, *Chrześcijanin na trudne czasy*, in «Tygodnik Powszechny» (28. 8. 2003), p. 1.

53 For an analysis of the debate and a selection of the key- voices in the debate see A. Polonsky - J. B. Michlic, *The Neighbors Respond, The Controversy Over the Jedwabne Massacre in Poland*, Princeton - Oxford 2004.

54 For Michał Głowiński's account of 'coming out of the closet', see the interview made by A. Grupińska, *Zapisywanie Zagłady. Z Michałem Głowińskim rozmawia Anka Grupińska*, in «Tygodnik Powszechny» (25. 3. 2001), pp. 14-15; also in < [www.tygodnik.com.pl/contrapunkt/50-51/glowinski.html](http://www.tygodnik.com.pl/contrapunkt/50-51/glowinski.html) >. Głowiński is also the author of a number of recently published personal accounts of his wartime experiences and his recent 're-discovery' of his Jewishness. See, for example, M. Głowiński, *Czarne Sezony*, Warszawa 1998, and his interview conducted by T. Torąńska, *Polskie gadanie. Rozmowa z Michałem Głowińskim*, in «Gazeta Wyborcza» (23. 5. 2005), < <http://serwis.gazeta.pl/df/1,34471,2721121.html> >.

due to the then climate of exclusivist ethno-nationalism. Głowiński's coming out of the closet can also be seen as belonging to a broader contemporary social phenomenon, particularly dramatic among child Holocaust survivors who remained in Poland after the end of World War II. Some of the Holocaust survivors' memoirs, published recently for the first time, are a telling testimony of their earlier escapes from Jewishness caused by both wartime and postwar experiences. They also reveal the survivors' present compelling need to describe that process, coming to terms with one's complex identity and the current relief they achieve by disclosing their Jewishness as a salient part of their identity<sup>55</sup>.

One also hopes that in the present cultural climate, the descendants of Frankists will open their private family archives and thus we will learn a great deal about their and their ancestors' understanding of self-identity, as well as about their responses to the culture of Polish exclusivist ethno-nationalism.

---

<sup>55</sup> See, for example, H. Mirska-Lasota, *Ucieczka od przeszłości*, Montreal 2006.